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Contending with Corruption--A Practical Guide for Special Operators

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Contending with Corruption– A Practical Guide for Special Operators



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Overview

U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) are frequently tasked to train, equip, advise, assist and accompany foreign partner forces, particularly in weak and failing states. One of the biggest and often overlooked challenges in implementing these USSOF programs is contending with host nation corruption.



Supplies being loaded on U.S. C-130 bound for SOF outstation



Special Forces soldiers training with Nigerien Armed Forces

Research design

This thesis aims to explore practical tools to counter corruption in operations overseas. Specifically, it develops the Areas of Corruption Vulnerability (ACV) model to investigate best practices in combatting corruption at critical points in time: the initial agreement with the partner, transition and turnover, human resources management, compensation and benefits, and local procurement. It then uses this model to investigate how the Chevron Corporation and the Research Triangle Institute view and combat host nation corruption in their operations.

Results

This investigation yielded that both Chevron and RTI face similar challenges as USSOF in contending with host nation corruption overseas, and both organizations have implemented best practices to mitigate corruption risks.



Some of the best practices Chevron employs include instilling a strong code of conduct in its training of local employees; a centralized finance department that can track all expenditures; an automated auditing system that can catch possible incidents of corruption early; leader performance reviews that evaluate quality of turnover; and local employee benefits that extend beyond base pay and provide incentives to follow Chevron’s code of conduct.



Some of RTI’s best practices include drafting explicit formal agreements with the host nation up front; creating robust audit and accountability systems of its programs; hiring local staff that provide buy-in and loyalty to the program; and using digital identification and mobile money payment systems to compensate employees and vendors.

Next Steps

Arm USSOF tactical advisors and program planners with practical tools to help mitigate the risk of host nation corruption. At the planning staff level, these tools include structuring initial agreements that ensure anti-corruption compliance; developing automated and transparent payment systems; empowering leaders to report and track corruption-related issues; reinforcing financial accountability through robust auditing systems; prioritizing program continuity to ensure successful transfer of knowledge to incoming teams; and monitoring local impact on BCP initiatives. Corruption mitigation tools at the tactical advisor level include understanding corruption, including various sub-types, and their potential impact on the mission; holding local partners accountable through regular performance audits; building the right culture during engagements that instills ethical and moral principles among partners; and improving financial accountability through digital payment systems and scrutinizing the procurement of local goods and services. The complete ACV model, expanding on best practices to mitigate host nation corruption risks, can be found in the concluding chapter, in Table 3.



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